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GREG CAPULLO TALKS ABOUT X-FORCE 25

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INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the nastiest blizzard to hit the Metropolitan area in many a year, I spoke with Greg Capullo, artist of X-Force, for several hours regarding his current work, his feelings on the comics industry, and about life in one of the fiercest cottage industries America has yet produced.

As one of Marvel's fastest (and best paid) rising stars, Greg is keenly aware of the Golden Goose that's nurturing him. But unlike many of his contemporaries, the 30-year-old artist is not a by-product of 1970's fandom. Drawing comic books is not a religion for Greg Capullo – it's a job that takes up all of his time and keeps him away from his guitar. But his lifelong distance from the comics world gives him a rather unique slant on the burgeoning industry in general, and his own work in particular. Moreover, his apparent lack of ego, which is becoming less and less common in these days of comics artist-cum-rockstar, made it possible to speak to him for several hours without yawning; hope he can say the same.

Clifford Meth

Clifford Meth

CAPPULO:

Clifford Meth: The 25th issue of X-Force marks two anniversaries, both the book's second and the end of your first full year on X- Force. What was it like taking over where Rob Liefeld left off?

Greg Capullo: I guess it was just fun because Rob had assembled such a cool team, especially by establishing Cable who is a very interesting character. I had the choice between X-Factor and X-Force, and X-Force seemed like so much more of a fun project that I just took that.

CM: Do you know Rob?

GC: No, not at all. I have still never spoken to him.

CM: Had you been reading the book prior to taking over?

GC: I don't read comics, so I guess the answer's no. But when I was going to take over X-Force I read all the books up to where they were at the time.

CM: Rob quickly built a name for himself by doing X-Force. The book literally came out of nowhere.

GC: Yeah, he's a powerhouse.

CM: I'm sure people have made a lot of comparisons between your work on X-Force and Rob's.

GC: Yes.

CM: Have you read any of those comparisons?

GC: Any of the written ones? No. I haven't seen anything like that. I've just had people talk to me about it.

CM: What have been their impressions?

GC: That they liked the change. That's about all I could or should say.

CM: They thought you were a better artist?

GC: Possibly. Yes, that could be true. [laughs] I don't want to say anything bad against Rob and I

don't want to come across as some guy who thinks he's really top-shelf or something like that.

CM: Nevertheless, you were put on X-Force at a time when it was the top book. Was there any pressure on you to draw like Rob?

GC: No, as a matter of fact. None at all.

CM: You said that you had your choice between X-Force and X-Factor...

GC: At the time they were looking at me to fill the space for the fall crossovers going on. They were preparing for "The Executioner's Song." I was kind of given the choice and I just took X-Force because, again, it just has more exciting characters to draw. Peter David's a fantastic writer, but X-Force is a lot more fun.

CM: Well both of those books are high profile, good royalties books. So how did you end up landing that gig?

GC: Bob Harras called me up while I was doing Quasar. He picked up an issue and goes, "Looks real good man, looks real good." And then he asked me to do X-Force Annual #1. After I did that, he just said, "How would you like to work a full time gig over here?" I was like, "Yeah, what do you think? [laughs] I'm on Quasar, man."

CM: Came out of nowhere, just like that? People would have killed for that job. In fact, I remember some of the people who were interested in taking over X-Force. I don't know who was actually considered because my ear isn't inside the X-Office, but I remember quite a few people saying that they really wanted it and that they were pushing hard. I'm sure people wonder what special thing you had in your favor that made you the favorite son who ended up with X-Force.

GC: I guess just the way I draw. My own personal opinion is that when Mark Pacella took over, he was really trying to look like Rob, and I just think that Marvel didn't want that. They wanted something new, not a forced repetition of somebody else, you know what I mean? Then there was the other guy, the guy with those stark black-and-whites who did one issue. Mignola. He's a great artist in my opinion, but the fans didn't react well to him, to the issue of X-Force that he did. So that's it. He got displaced out of that, too, and wasn't too thrilled. What can I say? I just drew the right pictures I guess.

CM: Let's talk a little bit about industry politics and what's going on inside Marvel. It's funny how much the industry has changed, where people are actually much more interested—and also much more giving of information—about what goes on inside "the office." What's it like working with the X-Office and the X-Editor?

GC: Well, I love Bob Harras. He treats me right and we've got a good relationship. Everything is really relaxed. That's it. He calls me up and says you did a good job and that's about it. It's just real easy-going.

CM: Does he give you any direction?

GC: No, as a matter of fact he doesn't. About the only thing that could even be construed as that is when we'll talk and he'll say, "What do you think we should put on the cover this month?" We'll discuss what went on in the story and say what do you think of this, what do you think of that? We'll bat that around occasionally, if I don't present it to him on my own. If I'm stuck for an idea that's the only direction that might come my way. Outside of that, he gives me free rein.

CM: How about John Romita, Sr. Does he work with you at all?

GC: No. He is art director. But no, I've never encountered anything with him. Earlier on, like in my first one or two jobs for Marvel, maybe I didn't do something quite right and it went to him and he gave me some direction, but I haven't spoken to him in a long time.

"...WHEN MARK PACELLA TOOK OVER [X-FORCE], HE WAS REALLY TRYING TO LOOK LIKE ROB, AND I JUST THINK THAT MARVEL DIDN'T WANT THAT. THEY WANTED SOMETHING NEW, NOT A FORCED REPETITION OF SOMEBODY ELSE..."

CM: Tell me about that. What did he teach you?

GC: There was actually only one instance that I can recall. In the What If issue where Daredevil killed the Kingpin, there was this down shot, and it was outside of a police station and I had cops all over the place and some were going into a police van. I had a kind of scattered type of composition, which didn't work, and being green at the time, I didn't know why. So he sent me back a tissue where he had made a beeline of these officers going into the van, which just made the composition much more cohesive instead of such a scattered thing. It held together much better.

CM: Romita was a brilliant artist in his time. In many ways, I think he was the benchmark that Marvel continues to use. As many giants and pioneers as they had, it was really Romita's style even more than Kirby's, that became the dominant house style. I've seen work that he touched up for other people where it just suddenly comes together. Gray Morrow once shared some pages with me, when he was working for Marvel. In fact he was working on a Captain America book; Romita was already art editor and this was going back at least a dozen or maybe 15 years. All Romita did was change one panel and it changed the whole page.

GC: He's a brilliant man. You can't take that away from him.

CM: Do you see him at all?

GC: I saw him briefly when I went down to the offices a couple of years ago. I just popped my head in and said hello. When I was trying to get into Marvel he offered some constructive criticism, and tried to get me work when I couldn't get any because he felt that I should be working. I really got along with him on that level because he's a really supernice guy and he was trying to help me out. So once I had "made" it, I just had to pop my head in there and shake his hand and say thanks a lot.

CM: Sales have suffered lately on X-Force. I would guess that's more because of the competition than anything else. And when I say competition, there's plenty of competition just between Marvel books. There's more and more books on the shelf each month. Apparently there's something special in store for issue #25. What's that?

GC: Well, first let me tell you my feelings about what you just said. Part of the reason sales are suffering is what you mentioned, but in all honestly I think that the thing that really lowered sales was the absence of Cable. The special thing about #25 will be the reappearance of Cable, and his presence will be in the book from now on.

CM: Were you in on the decision to bring him back?

GC: I've certainly voiced my opinion.

CM: So what happens in issue #25?

GC: Well, I haven't read the plot yet so I really can't tell you 100%. All that I know is that Cable does return.

CM: Is there any discussion about resolving the mystery about whether or not he is indeed baby Nathan?

GC: Hey, I thought it was going to be resolved in "Executioner's Song" like everybody else, but I suppose hanging onto that one card in your deck gives you the opportunity to play it over and over again. So I don't know when that will be fully disclosed or resolved.

CM: Do you work closely with Fabian?

GC: Define closely.

CM: Do you get together? Have a beer?

GC: He's in New York and I'm Upstate, so I never see him. I saw him once for the "X-Men summit" and I'm going to see him tomorrow for lunch. Once in a blue moon he'll call me or I'll call him, but it's just for niceties.

CM: So you don't really discuss plots at all?

GC: He and I have recently been discussing Cable and what should go on.

CM: Tell me about some of these discussions.

GC: He originally wanted Cable to be gone for a year and he also really wanted Sam to...well, we're still discussing things so I can't tell you *everything* that's going to be happening. But his vision is Sam being the team leader and the kids no longer really needing Cable to push them around, show them what to do and when to do it, because they've learned from him and now they're kind of discarding him. Fabian wanted Cable out of the book completely, at least for a year. But things are going to change because of sales dropping.

CM: Do you have anything else in mind for issue #25: diecut cover, hologram cover, talking cover? [laughs]

GC: It's going to be a gatefold cover and it's also going to have a hologram graphed onto it. It's about the size of a trading card underneath the logo I believe.

CM: I'm sure you've read some of the criticism that all the companies are taking now for all these "special effects." What do you make of it?

GC: Well, if I was a kid and I didn't have a whole lot of money, it would kind of tick me off because I'd want all this stuff, naturally. It starts to get real expensive and I'd have to steal money from my mom's wallet or sell drugs in the school yard. It's good for us because we make money, but it's bad for the kids.

CM: How old are you, Greg?

GC: 30.

"FABIAN WANTED CABLE OUT OF THE BOOK COMPLETELY, AT LEAST FOR A YEAR. BUT THINGS ARE GOING TO CHANGE BECAUSE OF SALES DROPPING."

"I LIKED THOR BUT I COULDN'T STAND READING HIM, YOU KNOW THE WAY HE TALKED WITH 'THEE AND THOU' AND ALL THAT STUFF. AS A LITTLE KID, MAN, IT'S LIKE SKIP ALL THAT AND LOOK AT THE PICTURES. IT WAS A LOT LIKE READING THE BIBLE AND YOU KNOW HOW MUCH KIDS HATE THAT."

CM: Where did you grow up?

GC: I grew up in these parts, here in Schenectady, New York.

CM: When did you start reading comics?

GC: Probably when I was about three years old I started looking at the pictures, because my mom found drawings of Batman and Robin that I did when I was that age. They look pretty bad but you can tell who they are.

CM: Do you remember what you were reading? You were a DC fan I take it?

GC: No, actually I wasn't a DC fan. I had a few of those. I had Batman, Superman, Aquaman, and Green Lantern. I remember those from DC. But mostly I was a Marvel man. I had Captain America, Thor, Hulk, Spider-Man, those types of titles thrilled me. I liked the Hulk a lot—the stupid green Hulk.

CM: Was the Hulk your favorite?

GC: Thinking back, I guess the Hulk was one of my favorites. I liked Thor but I couldn't stand reading him, you know the way he talked with "thee and thou" and all that stuff. As a little kid, man, it's like skip all that and look at the pictures. It was a lot like reading the Bible and you know how much kids hate that.

CM: Unfortunately. You and I are contemporaries Greg. When we were reading the Hulk, Marie Severin was drawing it, and later on Herb Trimpe became the guy who I always associate with the Hulk. Do you remember looking at names and credits and knowing who was drawing what?

GC: Oh yeah. I used to not even buy books if they didn't have good artists in them.

CM: Back in those days, all the Marvel titles had the same little handful of artists.

GC: That's true. I can tell you who my favorites were. I can remember those people.

CM: Who was #1?

GC: John Buscema, hands down, 100% all the way. John is king.

CM: John with Joe Sinnott inking him!

GC: Ooohhhhh!!! You're talking about the team now!

CM: That's great stuff. Let's get back to the Hulk, because it reminds me of something—all of a sudden, Herb Trimpe comes back drawing like Rob Liefeld, too.

GC: [laughs]

CM: Was that a surprise to the people you know?

GC: It was a surprise to me.

CM: Was it talked about?

GC: Yeah, there's a lot of tittering. Honestly, I just can't believe that somebody whose been around that long would do something like that.

CM: Well, the fact of the matter is that guys like Don Heck, Gray Morrow, and Dave Cockrum, and many of the "older" guys can't get work from Marvel unless they draw like Rob Liefeld or Jim Lee. And Rob's easier to imitate than Jim Lee.

GC: Obviously.

CM: Or Todd. I don't think anyone imitates Todd well. You'll never get anybody in the Marvel offices to admit it, but Image artists have become the new benchmark: Draw like this, draw like Image.

GC: I personally can't say that that's the truth because I haven't experienced that.

CM: I've heard it from others.

GC: Well then that's possible. I can't dispute it because I haven't talked to those people who it's happened to. But I believe you.

CM: It's the "cross-hatching" age of comics.

GC: [laughs] Well, those guys didn't invent cross-hatching.

CM: I find that there is also a tendency at Marvel not to hire "old-timers" anymore. Maybe it's by his own choice, but even John Buscema doesn't seem to be getting a lot of work anymore.

GC: Well, with Buscema it's definitely his choice. He's always been threatening to quit. It appears now, at least for the time being, that he has quit. But he's so incredibly fast that I hear he can do his whole year's contract worth of work in several months. He's getting a little bit older and he's made his money. Maybe he's just had it. Somebody heard him say that by the time you get good at this, it gets boring. Maybe he's got a little boredom in him and he's dropped out of the picture for a little while.

CM: Tom Palmer, who used to work with John, told me that John just puts his brain on automatic pilot when he does comic books at this point. He became completely disgusted with superheroes and I think Wolverine or Marvel Comics Presents were the

"IT APPEARS NOW, AT LEAST FOR THE TIME BEING, THAT [JOHN BUSCEMA] HAS QUIT. BUT HE'S SO INCREDIBLY FAST THAT I HEAR HE CAN DO HIS WHOLE YEAR'S CONTRACT WORTH OF WORK IN SEVERAL MONTHS."

last super-hero stuff he did. Now it's just Conan.

GC: Yeah. He always liked Conan.

CM: Let's go back. Where did you get some formal training? When did you start wanting to do this stuff?

GC: I didn't get any formal training, actually. I am completely self-taught.

CM: You learned to draw comics by reading comics?

GC: Oh, definitely not. No, no. I started out that way until I ran into Larry Hama who writes Wolverine but used to be an editor. I learned the most direction from Larry. As soon as he saw my stuff he said, "You're drawing with all symbols. You know what you need? Burn all your comics books; learn to draw from life." He's the one who pointed me in the direction of drawing from life and anybody who learns how to draw from comics is not going to be as good because they're getting a watered-down Xerox of somebody else's impression of life. In other words if somebody spends all of his time drawing from life, that's his Xerox of life. But if you come and copy his Xerox, it's going to be second generation. It's going to lose something in the translation.

CM: Like cloning a clone.

GC: Right. Plus you're going to learn his mistakes, too. At least you can learn your own mistakes if you go at it directly on your own. Larry really pushed me to do that, so that's what I did. I spent hours drawing from life, learning anatomy, all the Latin terms for the bones and muscles. I had sketchbooks devoted to hands, heads, feet, one of the entire female body, one of the entire male body. Then I'd have building sketches. I really dug into it. Larry directed

me toward a few good books– Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain is the first one he directed me to. Then I got another great book. Figure Drawing For All It's Worth by Andrew Loomis, which is out of print, but I was lucky enough to get one and that was a big help. Also Gray's Anatomy and that's about it. But I'm still trying to learn.

CM: Were you working at the time?

GC: I was working but not in art. I was a bellhop at a hotel.

CM: But you knew where you wanted to go?

GC: Yeah. I said I did, but I don't know if I wholeheartedly believed that I did, but I was going through the motions at any rate. I went down there and thought I was good, but of course I sucked. Larry Hama was the first one who really pointed that out to me.

CM: What year did you meet Larry Hama?

GC: The first time I went to Marvel was between '80 and '83. I had met a few people down there and everybody tried to be nice about things. The very first person I met there was Jim Shooter. The trouble is, when you're too gracious with somebody, they don't learn as much. Then I ran into Larry. Whoooooooo!! He carved you a new asshole, man. I'm telling you, he let's you know the deal. He doesn't pull any punches and that was the biggest help, having somebody do that to me. It gets you pissed off, but that helps separate the men from the boys because the ones who get pissed off and give up are the guys who would never be able to make a monthly deadline. The guys who keep coming back for more and are persistent are evidently the guys who are going to make good artists, who really want it and are willing to take good constructive criticism and be able to make monthly deadlines.

CM: Did you stay with Larry? Did you work with him?

GC: I think I visited Larry about three times. I got the most help from him.

CM: When did you say this was?

GC: Around '80 to '83.

CM: Right around that time he went over to Continuity, correct?

GC: Could be. I don't recall myself.

CM: Did you ever do any work for Continuity?

GC: No I haven't.

CM: What happened next?

GC: Well, the last time we met, we butted heads and he said, "You know, you're looking at me like you think I'm full of shit. You might as well get out of my office." I said, "You're right, I do think you're full of shit," and I walked out. Three years later I came to my senses and I said, "What the hell. I'm going to try the advice he had given me." And I could have kicked myself so many times because the advice Larry gave me was solid advice and I never grew so fast as when I really took him to heart and listened to everything he had to say. After that, I still wasn't quite good enough to get into comics, so I took a year off. When I finally decided to take Larry seriously, I took a year off from my job at the hotel and I spent 10 hours every single day drawing and learning, reading about it, and practicing. After a year, I put together a portfolio and started going around doing some ad work and, in the meantime, I was still preparing to do something for Marvel. I finally put together an eight-page Daredevil sequence. Then I went to a convention and showed it to Joe Sinnott and Joe said, "Oh, you should be working." At the same time, Tom Vincent, who's a colorist and a friend of mine, said, "Daredevil samples. Wow! My editor, Craig Anderson, needs them for a Daredevil story." So I sent the samples down and the very next day Craig Anderson called me up and said, "You got the job." That was the first job I got.

"IF SOMEBODY SPENDS ALL OF HIS TIME DRAWING FROM LIFE, THAT'S HIS XEROX OF LIFE. BUT IF YOU COME AND COPY HIS XEROX, IT'S GOING TO BE SECOND GENERATION. IT'S GOING TO LOSE SOMETHING IN THE TRANSLATION."

CM: What Daredevil was that?

GC: That was What if Daredevil killed the Kingpin? That was What If #2.

CM: How long ago was that?

GC: I got commissioned for that in about November '88 and it came out I think in '89.

CM: Do you remember the subsequent books that you worked on?

GC: I did a couple more What If's after that. Then I did one shots here and there. I did a fill in issue of Daredevil and some short spots here and there for something called Impossible Man's Summer Vacation Spectacular. Just little stupid things, and then I got Quasar. I worked on that for a little over a year. I dragged that up out of the toilet bowl because it was really sinking. I got it up another 20,000 copies or so when I was on it, which was quite a feat.

CM: It's good that you're conscious of sales.

GC: Well, they told me the sales. They said, "Man, you dragged this up 20,000 copies. That's really hard to do in a business like this these days." They patted me on the back, "You're doing great, you're doing great."

CM: What was the first royalty check you received?

"I WORKED ON [QUASAR] FOR A LITTLE OVER A YEAR. I DRAGGED THAT UP OUT OF THE TOILET BOWL BECAUSE IT WAS REALLY SINKING."

GC: Well the first one of course would have been off the first job, which was What If Daredevil Killed the Kingpin.

CM: You sold enough to get royalties from it?

GC: Oh yeah. What If was selling really well. I got something close to a couple grand.

CM: That must have been a thrill too.

GC: Yeah, that was nice. It was like found money.

CM: How did you pick Daredevil for your...

GC: I just did. I can't recall why.

CM: Did you model it after anything or anybody?

GC: No.

CM: At that point you were drawing from life?

GC: Yeah, definitely. You know what Larry told me to do, that's what I did. Then he said, "After you've got your chops down and you've learned how to draw on your own, then you can start looking through comics, see what other guys are doing. Now instead of just mindlessly copying, try to look at the problems they encountered; try and figure out what their thinking was, how they solved the problems, and if you see things that you like, then you can incorporate them into your style. First learn how to draw on your own before you

ever try to adapt anything that you've seen in a comic book." He said what you've got to try to do is forget everything you've ever seen in comic books, and that's a really hard thing to do. It hinders you more than it helps you in the beginning.

CM: Why did you pick Marvel? You haven't even mentioned DC.

GC: I was always a Marvel man. That's it. It never even occurred me to approach DC Comics.

CM: Why super-hero comics?

GC: Muscle guys beating people up, man. [laughs] I was a boy, you know? What could be better?

CM: There's so much more in comic books, but of course that's what's always sold.

GC: Oh yeah. Rough and tumble, man. That's about it. That's why I love the Hulk; he's "Hulk SMASH!" I dug it, man.

CM: Have you ever drawn the Hulk?

GC: No, I never got the opportunity to draw the Hulk.

CM: It sounds like you'd like to.

GC: Well, if he sold better.

CM: Maybe with you drawing him, he would sell better.

GC: Well, you just can't compete with those X-books.

CM: That's true. Let's change the subject. You're an adult working in a medium that communicates to children. Do you find it hard to cater to younger audiences?

GC: I guess I don't ever consciously think about it. I never think about what audience I'm directing this stuff to. It just never, ever crosses my mind. All I do is my job. That's it. I don't think, "Gee, if a kid sees this, will it sell for a kid or won't it fly for a kid." I just get my plot and do what I do. I suppose I should put a little more thought into it, but then I don't want to get caught up in this total sellout of the way a comic book "should" be done. I don't want to compromise myself is

promise what a comic should be in order to appeal to a certain crowd. Maybe that's smart, maybe that's stupid. I don't know. I don't want my book to be filled with pin-ups, which kids love because then you sacrifice storytelling. I'm trying to find a middle ground somewhere, so that's about the closest I come to consciously thinking about my audience. The closest I come is thinking, "Well I've got to try to make some big shots here and there," but that's as far as it goes, actually. I just try to do good storytelling.

CM: Do you remember the late Kirby books, how you'd open up page two and three to that spread every time and you always knew what to expect. In fact, with John Buscema books, the first page was always a big splash also, but then you wouldn't see any splashes after that. Usually those splashes always had quite a bit of composition, they weren't just a character shot. That's changed very much.

GC: Yeah it has. It's almost like...not that I'm a great artisan...but it seems to be a lost art. Maybe it's because of my age. I like that stuff and I don't think it should be lost even though these big splashy things sell so much, which has been proven by Rob Liefeld, Jim Lee, and Todd McFarlane. I just don't want to lose it completely. I want to try to find a middle ground. I think Jim Lee finds a middle ground actually. He's not splash, splash, splash, all the time. He still keeps in mind storytelling to a degree.

CM: Which current artist do you like?

GC: Jim Lee. I love Jim Lee.

CM: Why? Describe what he does from an artist's point of view.

GC: It's just exciting for some reason. I can't even put my finger on it. He just draws cool shots, cool characters. He's a good artist. Rob is maybe not the best artist but he really has an

"I THINK JIM LEE REALLY KNOWS HOW TO DRAW WELL."

approach that's very dynamic and powerful. Whereas Jim Lee has got that but he also is a real artisan, too. So that's why I dig him. I look for somebody who knows how to draw well. I think Jim really knows how to draw well.

CM: I'm sure at this point you've looked pretty much on the whole Gestalt of comics. Who would you pick out as the single greatest comic artist of all time?

GC: John Buscema. I love John Buscema, man.

CM: John's certainly up there. My personal favorite is Neal Adams. It's the Neal face more than anything.

GC: Definitely. The only reason why I would pick John over him is because John really had the human figure down and when I looked at Neal's figures something about it just...it was kind of lanky and that always kind of bugged me a little bit, but people are built like that. I just loved the tank-like figures that Buscema always built. They always had such great weight to them.

CM: I've only met John once. I ran into him as a kid at the first Marvel Con. Did you go to the conventions in the past?

GC: No, not at all.

CM: Did you collect comics or just read them?

GC: I collected them, I guess. Not thinking I'm collecting them, I just bought them and saved them in a box.

CM: When did you stop reading comics?

GC: I don't even remember at what age I stopped. It came to the point where I would no longer even buy them to read them, I would just flip through and see if there was some art that turned me on and just buy it to look at the art and not even care about the story. That's just the way I've been.

CM: I saw an ad recently in the Buyers Guide from Dark Horse. It said, "Dark Horse Comics–Comics To Read."

GC: Well, you wouldn't have sold me as a kid unless you had

good artists. That's all I cared about.

CM: Let's get back to X-Force. There's got to be more happening than just Cable making a reappearance and coming back to lead the team. Are there plans for new characters? I mean you certainly have a wealth of new mutants to draw.

GC: That's it. There's so many mutants right now that you might find a couple getting the ax from the actual team.

CM: There's quite a bit of Cable's past still to resurrect.

GC: Right. Well, he's got his own series now to cover a lot of that. I don't know which books will handle what. I'll find out more soon.

CM: What other characters do you draw in your spare time? Perhaps I should ask if you draw in your spare time?

GC: I have no spare time. [laughs]

CM: How many pages do you do in a day?

GC: If I'm lucky, I can get off a page and a half a day, but I would safely say my average is a page a day.

CM: Paul Ryan recently told me he can do three a day.

GC: Well, God bless him. There are people who can do more than that even. They all make me ill.

CM: Paul's been around a long time. I've heard stories that Kirby used to do four.

GC: I heard more than that. I heard Kirby could do eight.

CM: Eight? Man, the legend gets bigger and bigger, you know? When I was a kid, they used to say he did four.

GC: Who knows, then. The fish was this big. No it was this big.

CM: Speaking of Kirby, have you considered working for Image?

GC: [laughs] Got to watch this question! Todd McFarlane came

to me and I've been kicking myself ever since because he approached me with a really nice offer. This is a really tough question that I really don't know...

CM: Well, you just answered it. They asked you to work. Another question is do you ever want to create your own book?

GC: Well sure, I think about it, but there's so many other factors that mix in.

CM: Is it still the kiss of death at Marvel? If you work for Image, does that mean you're done at Marvel?

GC: I guess not because there was Brandon Peterson who was doing Uncanny X-Men for a bit there. Am I right?

CM: I don't know.

GC: I believe that's who I'm thinking of and he went and did something for Image and now he's coming back.

"IF I'M LUCKY, I CAN GET OFF A PAGE AND A HALF A DAY, BUT I WOULD SAFELY SAY MY AVERAGE IS A PAGE A DAY."

CM: I know my friend Walt Simonson is doing some work for Image now and I'm certain Marvel's not going to ban Walt.

GC: Right.

CM: Same thing with Jae Lee. There's no talk about him leaving Marvel even though he's now doing an Image book.

GC: Right. Well then I guess you answered your own question. There were rumors flying about that, though.

CM: That's because it was the kiss of death for guys like Valentino.

GC: I think it has a lot to do with how you leave. You know what I'm saying?

CM: Probably how good you are, too, when you leave.

GC: I don't know about that.

CM: Maybe it is how you leave. But I heard that Romita Sr. was saving Valentino's work all the while he was at Marvel. Someone told me Romita was fixing all of it.

GC: I definitely think it's how you treat people and what you say after you've left publicly that will affect anything like that.

"[MY WIFE] DOESN'T READ [COMICS]. SHE JUST COMES IN, SAYS, 'LOOKS GOOD' OR, WELL THAT'S ALL SHE BETTER SAY."

CM: What are you doing when you aren't drawing comics?

GC: Sleeping. [laughs]

CM: Does your wife get into comics at all?

GC: She doesn't read them. She just comes in, says, "Looks good" or, well that's all she better say. [laughs] No, that's it. She just comes in and sees what I'm doing and that's about all.

CM: Do you bother going to conventions today?

GC: Well, the thing is I get invitations here and there but because I'm so slow -I'm always worried about my deadline that I turn them down because I just don't want to get behind and have more stress on me. I'm stressed enough.

CM: You weren't at the big New York show recently?

GC: No I wasn't.

CM: Do you plan to go to San Diego?

GC: I haven't gotten an invitation for San Diego, actually. I am going to some convention out in California in May with Joe Quesada and John Romita, Jr. and a whole list of people. The only one I think from the X-books who's not going to be there is Andy Kubert.

CM: Andy is very close with my good friend Ron Wagner. Do you know Ron's work?

GC: Yeah.

CM: You should hear Ron's music. It matches his drawing ability.

GC: I'm a player too. I play heavy metal lead guitar.

CM: It's tough giving up one for the other.

GC: Yeah, well you have to look at practicalities, too, you know?

CM: Did you ever think about really doing music for a living?

GC: It's too tough. I would never even try. It's just too crazy. So much luck is involved. I see so many super-talented people and they just stay there and grow old doing it in the bars. No, it never, ever crossed my mind to try to be a rock star.

CM: That's basically what you're becoming in this industry.

GC: I guess in a way.

CM: Well, for the first time comic artists are becoming rock stars. I mean you're getting paid like...well...

GC: [laughs] Not quite!

CM: Well not quite to scale, but certainly quite a lot better than anybody would have thought years ago. People are paying for autographs. There is a real phenomenon here. Comic books have legitimately become an industry with Marvel going public. Of course, there's a question about how long it can last. How long do you think it will last?

GC: Who knows. You just go along for the ride while it's here, man. Who knows how long each of our lives last for that matter.

CM: Do you ever think about the end of this growth pattern? I mean it can't continue like this.

GC: No, probably not. Invest wisely is the only thing I plan on doing.

CM: When it shakes out, how do you plan on being around still, or do you want to be around? Do you want to do comics for the rest of your life?

GC: It all depends. If it gets to a point where I can't make as much money as I did in advertising, I'll go back to advertising, do illustrations. It's a lot less demanding, a lot less stressful, and really lucrative.

CM: How about storyboarding?

GC: I thought about that, too, because I've done that for TV spots already. I thought about doing it for the movies.

CM: That's good money. I know Jim Steranko recently did Francis Ford Coppola's Dracula.

GC: That must have been a blast.

CM: He probably made more money off that gig than he did in his whole career in comics.

GC: Yeah, yeah. That's true. I hear Art Adams is doing it too.

CM: Is that right?

GC: That's what I heard, but who knows. You heard Kirby did five pages, I heard eight, so who knows!

CM: Speaking of cross-industries, it's interesting how many people have gotten into cartoons. Larry Hama's a perfect example. He probably made more money off "Bucky O'Hare" than off of all his comic book work combined. I think certain people become addicted to the comic book industry though and they're forced to hang around.

GC: Definitely hooks you.

CM: Do you feel that way?

GC: I do because if you had sat me down before I got locked in I'd say there'd be no way I'm going to work that fucking hard. But I am and I'm hooked on it, you know what I mean? It's like I'm compelled...because you get into this, well I can only speak for myself. I get into this thing where I'm constantly trying to improve and I'm never happy with my job, so it's always like I can't wait for the next plot so I can try to do better, try to do better, try to do better. It's just like this neverending search for perfection, which doesn't exist.

"I GET INTO THIS THING WHERE I'M CONSTANTLY TRYING TO IMPROVE AND I'M NEVER HAPPY WITH MY JOB, SO IT'S ALWAYS LIKE I CAN'T WAIT FOR THE NEXT PLOT SO I CAN TRY TO DO BETTER..."

WE CAN'T LET THEM GET THEIR HANDS ON CABLE'S STUFF--
IT'S ALL WE GOT LEFT OF HIM--ALL HE LEFT US--
--SO NO MATTER WHO IT IS GOIN' FOR IT--
IT'S OURS!

"EVEN THOUGH AD WORK HAS MORE RELAXED DEADLINES, IT'S DEFINITELY NOT AS FULFILLING AS DOING COMIC STUFF. I'M HOOKED IN THAT RESPECT."

CM: I see that with certain people—they are comic culture incarnate.

GC: I know very little about the industry because I don't read comics and I don't really follow them, but I'm hooked on doing them, that's for sure. Even though ad work has more relaxed deadlines, it's definitely not as fulfilling as doing comic stuff. I'm hooked in that respect.

CM: Do you feel an affinity to the characters you draw?

GC: On a very low scale. After being in advertising, I approach everything as a job. I suppose I do get into it a little bit. You can't help it after you've been with a certain character for so much time, but I'm not really whacked out over it.

CM: I'm just saying that perhaps you started conceptualizing certain characters on your own already.

GC: Oh yeah, in that respect yes.

CM: This might be fantasy on my part, but if John Buscema didn't love the Surfer, I don't think we would have loved the Surfer.

GC: That's probably true.

CM: He drew the character with a lot of love. In an interview with Stan Lee, Stan told me that was the only character besides Ben Grimm that he really loved. It's kind of a catharsis. You take a little aspect of your personality and that character becomes it.

GC: I don't give that a second thought because I guess as an artist that happens anyhow no matter what you put your pencil to paper to do because it's always your feeling about something. That's why if you sit down and draw an ear and I sit down to draw an ear, even though we're looking at the same ear, they would look different because we feel differently about that ear. I guess you can't help but have your feelings put into the things you're drawing.

CM: That makes a lot of sense. When I was talking about the comic culture, I see how certain people, even years and years later, they're still very taken in. Walt Simonson's a perfect example, how he walks around at the conventions and he's just so involved in the industry, working for every single company. Walt is concurrently working for like four of the majors and it's not because he needs the money, it's because the guy just loves this stuff. Dave Cockrum's the same way. He's

just into the industry. Other guys such as Dick Ayers, who are a little bit older, don't give a shit about it. It's something he once did, and that's all. I guess it's a personality type. It depends upon who you are.

GC: Part of the thing that ruins it for me is if I was a little faster it wouldn't be as stressful on me. That's the only reason why I look at it as a job and I have a little less love. When you're Walt and you've got so much damn speed, then it is more fun because you can whip this stuff out. Maybe in a couple of years I'll have a little more speed and then I'll have a little more love. Right now, when you've got bags under your eyes and you don't have time to play your guitar or do whatever else you want to be doing, then it takes a little bit of the fun out of it.

CM: You really feel that burnt out by it, huh?

GC: Well, hey I do it and I never miss deadlines, so I don't say I'm burnt out, but I sure do feel worn a little bit.

CM: Do you think you get paid enough for all the work that you're doing?

GC: Yes. [laughs] That's what keeps you going, man, I'm telling ya. It helps to keep you going, anyhow.

CM: It would make it very difficult, I would imagine, once you're on a book...what's X-Force selling, 400,000 copies?

GC: I think with the absence of Cable it might have dipped a little bit, but that tends to be it's average.

CM: What I was getting at is that it would be very difficult for you to replace that with another book.

GC: Not if it were X-Men.

CM: Yeah, I guess X-Men would really be one of the exceptions, or some kind of limited series.

GC: Sure. That's true when you have that #1 issue, which you know is going to put in a monster sale and if it's like a four issue mini-series you'll have pretty high sales for the remainder of that little stint.

CM: Do you ink yourself?

GC: I just started doing a little bit of my own inks. I started doing covers. The first cover I inked just appeared on issue #21.

CM: That must be a real good feeling.

GC: Yeah, that's cool. A little more work. My wife says, "What are you, an idiot?"

"...IF I WAS A LITTLE FASTER [COMICS] WOULDN'T BE AS STRESSFUL ON ME. THAT'S THE ONLY REASON WHY I LOOK AT IT AS A JOB AND I HAVE A LITTLE LESS LOVE."

CM: The inking rate is not as high as the penciling rate, so why bother?

GC: One is because it gives you a chance to be 100% yourself and let people see what you are. Even though I'm not the best inker, it gives me a sense of satisfaction that I started and finished my own job. I don't want to ink a whole book, I'll leave that to a real inker.

CM: I would think that if I was a penciller, I would very much want to ink some of my own stuff just to see what it looked like—it's all me. I'd even want to color it.

GC: I would love to have full control, yes.

CM: Do you do any coloring at all?

GC: No. If I was faster, who knows. I could maybe do a couple more things at the same time, but as it stands now it's just too much of a chore doing my one job.

CM: Who do you think is really more important to the book nowadays, the writer or the artist?

GC: Well, like I told you about when I was a kid, I wouldn't buy it unless it had good art. So I feel that the artist is—not taking anything away from the writers because, of course, if there was no story there'd be no art—but comics is primarily a visual media. So with that you'd have to conclude that the artist would be more important. I would think. I could be wrong. I'm sure Fabian would tell me I'm wrong.

CM: Have you read things like Watchmen or The Dark Knight Returns or any of the really well-written books?

GC: Well, I did when Frank Miller put out the Dark Knight books. I did get that stuff and read it and I liked it.

CM: How about Watchmen? Did you ever read that?

GC: No. I heard it's a real class act. I should have put my hands on that.

CM: I'd recommend that and V for Vendetta. That was also written by Alan Moore.

GC: Many people have told me to go and read that.

CM: The guy's a monster. I don't want to say he's in the wrong industry, but the industry won't catch up to him for a long, long time. That writing is more important than the art and I would think that when you read something like that as a script, it might even be intimidating. "How do I live up to this?" I forget who the artists were, who actually worked on those projects. They were damn good, too.

GC: See, there you go! I guess it's all in who you talk to.

CM: Change gears a little bit. There's a lot of guys out there who, well I mentioned Dave Cockrum before, but especially guys like Kirby, Ditko, Don Heck...people who've worked through the '50s and '60s who never got any royalties, never got their pages back even. Do you think there ought to be a pension for underpaid or ill- treated people like there is in baseball?

GC: If I was one of those guys, I would say yes. But then again, it's like going back and saying...minimum wage back then was $1.25 and now the minimum

wage is greater so you guys should pay me all that back money because minimum wage is higher now.

CM: But in certain cases some of these guys actually created the characters that these companies were built on.

GC: If you've created some monster, it's just like with Motown and stuff like that. I guess maybe there should be some kind of compensation, but who am I to say? I would be bitter if it happened to me, if I got ripped like that.

CM: Let's pretend you're the head of Marvel for a minute. What changes would you make? How would you address this problem first of all, because it's certainly a problem. It's something that comes up again and again. The rape of Jack Kirby was one of the most interesting articles I ever read in Rolling Stone. I actually couldn't sell my Stan Lee story to certain publications—and I'm going back to '85, '86—because Kirby represented the underdog who had been slammed. This terribly un-American thing had gone down... So you're in charge of Marvel. How do you deal with it? How do you deal with all those pages that Kirby still can't get back and Marvel says is their property.

GC: That's tough because I'm an artist, so no matter what I'm answering from an artists' point of view, which is to say give him the fucking pages. But if you're the president of the company, you don't have that interest in mind; you have your own agenda. It's a question I can't even answer. It's like what would you do if you were God, you know? You have a whole different agenda. By rights, I would think that he should get what he needs, what he has coming to him.

CM: All right. You're still president of Marvel...better yet, we won't make you president, just publisher. We'll take the heat off a little bit. You don't have to answer to the Board of Trustees. Would you continue to put out more and more books?

GC: See again, from an artist's point of view I'd say no because it's going to drop the sales across the board, which is going to hurt my royalties. But if I'm running the company I'm going to say, well this is great because I can put out all these books and my company will make more money. The overall sales of each individual book will drop and then I'll pay less royalties to the people who are working on those books. In one respect, I'd be doing the right thing. According to the artist, I'd be doing the wrong thing. It's another one of those questions.

CM: As a businessman, I would still call that thinking penny-wise and pound-foolish, and I'll tell you why. I don't think that Marvel's big intent was to save money by reducing royalties. I think that they are rather short-sighted in this attempt to fill retailers' shelves with Marvel product and make kids overlook DC, Valiant, Image, etc. And I don't think that their strategy is working. Say I'm a kid walking into a comic store with exactly $10 to spend; I can get 10 of the 100 Marvel comics that came out this month or I can

get every Valiant book. I say, "Fuck Marvel. I'm going to collect Valiant. I'm going to collect Image." A lot of people are doing exactly this.

"I DON'T READ ANY [MARVEL COMICS]. I DON'T EVEN READ MY OWN BOOKS. I DON'T HAVE TIME. TO BE TRUTHFUL, OCCASIONALLY I'LL READ MY ISSUES JUST TO MAKE SURE I KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING."

GC: Well there's truth in what you say, too. Maybe I'm just being paranoid when I came up with my theory.

CM: You wouldn't stay that course though.

GC: Well, if I was the publisher, I guess I would.

CM: Which one do you think makes more sense? More and more Marvel books?

GC: I don't think that's the right course. I'm very opposed to it.

CM: How do other artists and writers feel about it? Do you guys talk about it at all?

GC: I think the handful of people I've talked to about it are opposed to it also.

CM: Is there more activity in the X-Office? Any talk of more spin-offs?

GC: Yes. I heard rumor that there could be a Bishop mini-series. There's Generation X. Outside of that, I think everything's already been publicized.

CM: Right. I know about the Gambit one that Lee Weeks is working on too. And of course X-Men 2099.

GC: I don't think that's in the X office. I don't think Bob Harras is editing that.

CM: The X-books are the only ones that seem to make sense to spin-off because they work so well. I like X-spin-offs. I dig that. I like looking at them. I like reading them. On the other hand, I wasn't able to justify books like Silver Sable, or She Hulk, or She Thor, or She Spider-Man, any of these things. I don't get it. I think it's silly. Marvel needs a crisis to solve the problem.

GC: I don't get it either but since I don't read them, it doesn't really bother me. I don't read any of them. I don't even read my own books. I don't have time. To be truthful, occasionally I'll read my issues just to make sure I know what's happening.

CM: Outside of Fabian, are there any other writers that you like?

GC: I liked working with Mark Gruenwald a lot. I think he's a really good writer. It was fun working with him on Quasar. He's a really cool guy.

CM: A lot of people think that books today are less literate than ever. Do you agree with that?

GC: Not if you're working with Mark Gruenwald.

CM: If all comics were separated into two categories, adult and juvenile, and the pay were the same, which one would you choose to work in?

GC: What do you mean when you say adult and juvenile?

CM: Adult is DC's Vertigo line. I don't know if you've been catching any of those books...like Sandman, and Death, the High Cost of Living. In Marvel's case, what's their most mature title...maybe Peter David's stuff.

GC: X-Force I guess you would consider juvenile, even though now we're trying to get an older market involved. It's more fun because you get a little more of slap, kick and punch stuff, which is what I want to do. That's fun. In that respect, maybe I'd go with the juvenile stuff.

CM: So you're looking for more action.

GC: Yeah. That's what's fun to draw if you're a comic book artist. Nobody wants to draw a room filled with talking people. That's a drag. That's a downer.

CM: Can you draw action from life?

GC: You got sports, right?

CM: Do you look at sports and draw that?

GC: One of the sources I used to go to was wrestling magazines...you know the fake wrestling.

CM: Don't tell that to John Hebert.

GC: Right! You have muscle-bound guys flying through the air. Well John's a hard-core fan, if you tell him it's fake you'll get body- slammed. That's a great source, but I also drew from basketball magazines even though you don't have the exact same action happening. You see, whenever you sit down and draw you're still drawing from information that you have in your mind. So once you have enough working knowledge of the human figure and you've seen the human figure in action, whether it's dumping a basket or punching somebody, then you've learned the mechanics of a body and that's how you put it together.

CM: That makes sense. Where do you think you've applied that? Any particular issues of X-Force that you can point to?

GC: No. It's just all together now.

CM: Was any one issue your best work to date?

GC: The one I just finished. Every single one, in my opinion, gets a little stronger because you learn more each time you go.

CM: That must be a good feeling.

GC: It's also frustrating because you always hate what you did last.

CM: Do you sell your originals?

GC: No.

CM: You've kept all your pages?

GC: For the most part. I've only sold a handful.

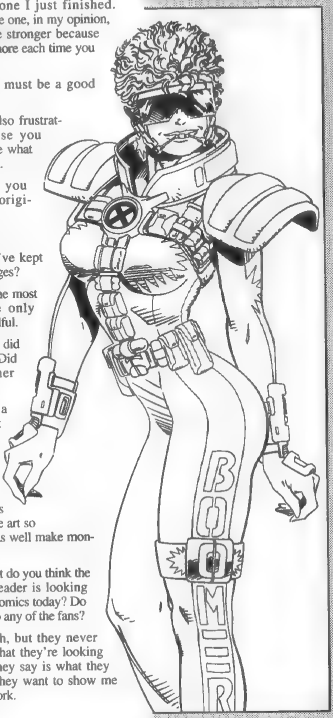
CM: How did that feel? Did it bother you?

GC: It did a little bit and it probably still would but you can always make more art so you may as well make money.

CM: What do you think the average reader is looking for from comics today? Do you talk to any of the fans?

GC: Yeah, but they never tell me what they're looking for. All they say is what they like and they want to show me their artwork.

"NOBODY WANTS TO DRAW A ROOM FILLED WITH TALKING PEOPLE. THAT'S A DRAG. THAT'S A DOWNER."



"WHEN [FAN] LETTERS COME IN AND I HAVE TIME, I'LL SIT DOWN, WRITE THEM A PERSONAL LETTER AND MAKE A DRAWING FOR THEM."

CM: Do you read their letters?

GC: Yeah, of course.

CM: When a letter is sent to Marvel, do they all get forwarded to you?

GC: If they're directed to me. Some of course aren't. They may be talking about this book and it goes to the editor only, but the ones that are written to me get forwarded to me.

CM: How many would you say you get a month?

GC: Not that many at all. Only a few straggle in here and there.

CM: Are they basically fan letters asking for your autograph?

GC: Yeah, autographs. Some even ask for original artwork from "The Executioner's Song." "Be happy if you can send me a page." I don't think so kid, but I'll give them a sketch or something like that. It's easy now because I don't get that many letters.

CM: Wait until this article comes out!

GC: When these letters come in and I have time, I'll sit down, write them a personal letter and make a drawing for them. Or at the very least if I'm really pressed for time, which is often the case, I'll send them a Xerox of a drawing that I did, autograph it and write them a personal letter.

CM: That's pretty nice of you.

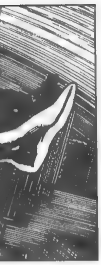
GC: I think it's cool. I think it's important. I mean I'm nobody special. I'm just a regular guy who used to be a kid in their position.

CM: I agree with you. I think it's important, too, that you make somebody's day or month by doing something like that. It's just a minute or two out of your life and you really do something for the kids.

GC: I suppose it's easy now because I only get a couple here and there but I suppose if you're Jim Lee and you have boxes full, you just can't do it. You want to do it but you just don't have the time. Even the ones I get may sit here for a while, maybe even for a month, but they do get responses.

CM: Do you check out any of the comics from England?

GC: No. The only comics that I've ever left my house to buy



were Jim Lee's stuff and Silvestri's stuff when he did Image. I only have Cyberforce #1 and W.I.L.D.CATS #1 and #2. That's the only thing I left my house to go after. The rest of the stuff just comes to me from Marvel. That's one of the perks.

CM: You'd probably like Simon Bisley's work.

GC: I don't want to insult people because I don't know their names. It's just that I'm so removed from it all. I just don't pay attention. People are like, "You don't know who this is?" and I'm like, "Nope, sorry man, no offense."

CM: Let's talk a little bit about the cerebral aspect of being an artist. Do you think that an artist is made or born?

GC: He's born with the advantage of not having to labor as hard as someone else, but it definitely has to be cultivated. You're born with that spark but then you have to take that spark and fan it into a flame.

CM: What do you think of the theory that creativity is the expression of neurosis?

GC: Say again? [laughs] If you talk to me, that explains it all. I'm the most neurotic son-of-a-bitch, boy.

CM: What time do you get up in the morning?

GC: Around 6:00.

CM: When do you start working?

GC: Around 6:10.

CM: No shit. [laughs] You roll out of bed and you're on paper.

GC: You got it man.

CM: When do you eat?

GC: I'll stop for like five minutes, grab something, eat it while I look at my paper, begin thinking about what I'm going to do next, and then sit down and start working until my wife comes home. We sit down and have dinner and then sometimes I go right back to work, which is really most of the time.

CM: A number of artists have become writers. Are you aware of that?

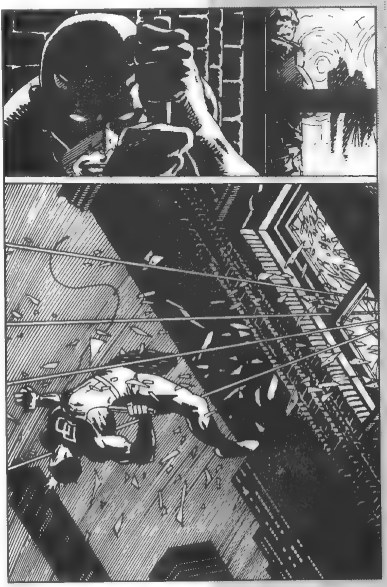
GC: Yeah.

CM: Why do you think this occurs?

GC: Can't speak for them. Maybe it's that they couldn't draw the pictures that they wanted to draw? I don't know.

CM: John Byrne once said that it was out of desperation over the

"THE ONLY COMICS THAT I'VE EVER LEFT MY HOUSE TO BUY WERE JIM LEE'S STUFF AND SILVESTRI'S STUFF WHEN HE DID IMAGE."



low literary level of the material that he was working on. I don't know if he put it quite in those words. But in other words, he was so dissatisfied with the scripts he was receiving, he thought he could write it better himself.

GC: That was his case. For myself, it would be so that I could draw the subject matter I would want to draw. That would be the thing that would first enter my mind.

CM: Have you come up with any characters, things you want to draw?

GC: I have a couple of ideas rolling around in my head. I've done a couple of things, created a couple of characters for Marvel.

CM: Which ones?

GC: They haven't been seen yet. I invented a couple characters. One of the characters is Killjoy...actually there's talk it may become a toy.

CM: Are you paid for that?

GC: They're supposed to.

CM: At least a box full of toys, right? How would you describe the average comic book creator? You guys are a unique lot. You're a cottage industry.

GC: Guys who haven't fully grown up, I would say. You've got to have a little bit of kid in you to work in comic books. Think about it. They're comic books.

CM: Do you hang around with other people in the industry?

GC: Unfortunately, no. Occasionally I see John Hebert and I've been out with Val Semeiks a few times. That's about as far as it goes. Oh, and Tom Vincent. Outside of that, there's nobody else around here.

CM: How do you know Hebert?

GC: I got my start doing a little bit of comic stuff for Fantaco in Albany and John was also doing

some work for them and I think that's how I met him. He's a cool guy.

CM: Watching John is like watching early Zeck.

GC: Yeah, John was tutored by Mike Zeck.

CM: I think Hebert's starting to really grow now, too. But he doesn't have a regular book yet. And it's too bad because I think he's very competent. There's got to be a lot of competition now, despite the fact that there's more and more books. It's now seen as a lucrative industry, and there's got to be a lot of people running from advertising to comics.

GC: Probably, though I can't see...well being on an X-book, I can see it but if you're just going to run from advertising into a low level book, I can't see it because the money is easy and fast in advertising.

CM: There's that much work?

GC: There was for me. I made a good living and worked an average of 20 hours a week and it was a very good life.

CM: Did you work on anything that I would know? Any campaigns?

GC: I did stuff for General Electric and I'm sure you don't have Price Chopper in your area but they're an extremely popular supermarket chain. I did all their ads and stuff like that.

CM: What were you drawing, lettuce?

GC: Food. Yeah. All kinds of food.

CM: That's got to be boring.

GC: Yeah, but big money and fast money. Actually, I had fun doing illustrations because it wasn't just drawing food. I got to draw some nice black-and-white watercolor paintings and different kinds of stuff like that, so it was cool.

CM: What's the toughest thing about working in the comic book field?

GC: Deadlines.

CM: What's the best part?

GC: Well, now it's the money. The best part is if you remove the deadlines, then it's just sheer fun because you're drawing this crazy stuff. These crazy muscle-bound people and these pretty girls and all these action scenes.

CM: So the deadline is really the drag.

GC: It's a drag for me because I'm slow, but there are guys who can whip this stuff out so I'm sure it doesn't bother them like it bothers me. For me, it really ruins a lot of the fun.

CM: You're not alone in that.

GC: I'm sure I'm not but there are some guys who are just so fast!

CM: The people I really hear that from are younger people like our age. Do you know Mike Witherby?

GC: No.

CM: He inked for Rubenstein for a long time. Now he's been inking Morbius for the last year. Anyway, Mike and Ron Wagner and Mark Texiera, all of these guys, it's like, "Oh my fucking deadlines, man! I've got to get this out...oh shit!" It's a constant. I've got one friend who is taking sleeping pills to get to sleep at night, he's so worked up about this shit. But then I talk to Paul Ryan and he says, "Oh yeah, I can knock off three pages a day." He's doing Fantastic Four and Ravage together. I went to Simonson's house and...well the guy practically hurts himself just telling you a story, he's bouncing around the room so much. He's got like four boards, "Oh, over here I'm doing an Image thing, and over here is a Valiant thing, and over here is a DC thing," and he's jumping around the room showing you what he's doing. And it's all great stuff! It's amazing how the same exact situation drives one guy. For another guy, it kills him. I think it has to do with the age. I mean, don't you find yourself getting faster?

"WHEN I GET FASTER I START PUTTING IN MORE DETAIL, AND WHEN I GET FASTER I START FILLING IN BLACKS INSTEAD OF JUST X-ING LARGE AREAS, AND THEN WHEN I GET FASTER I DECIDE, 'WELL I ALSO WANT TO INK MY OWN COVERS.' THE FASTER I GET THE MORE THINGS I DO TO SLOW MYSELF DOWN."

GC: Yeah. I have gotten faster and then I'm a total idiot. When I get faster I start putting in more detail, and when I get faster I start filling in blacks instead of just x-ing large areas, and then when I get faster I decide, "Well I also want to ink my own covers." The faster I get the more things I do to slow myself down.

CM: Are you a workaholic?

GC: No. I hate working. I'm not a workaholic. I'm a perfectionist and I guess that's what drives me.

CM: Where are you going to be a year from now? Will you still be on X-Force?

GC: Answer carefully. [laughs] Who knows, who knows. I want to say yes but it's hard to say. I want to do what's best for my career because the time that's allotted to being at the top...not that I think I've reached anywhere near a peak yet...is so short-lived that I think you've really got to make smart choices. I want to be loyal to Marvel, obviously. I turned down a very handsome offer from Todd. But who knows. I know they can't do for me financially what Image or even Valiant can do. but I'm going to try to stay loyal to Marvel. Somewhere along the line I might have to make a choice. So far I've chosen Marvel. Let's see if the company returns the favor and chooses me.

"I HATE WORKING. I'M NOT A WORKAHOLIC. I'M A PERFECTIONIST AND I GUESS THAT'S WHAT DRIVES ME."

CM: Do you want to do X-Men?

GC: Well, no, I'm not saying that. I'm not saying that at all because Andy's a nice guy and I would never try to muscle a book away from someone else. Then you get this whole bitter thing going on. I won't object to dragging X-Force's sales up though and maybe even exceeding X-Men. Anything's possible. That's more of an exciting goal for me anyhow. If I were to be put on the X-Men, then the sales are already there...there isn't any achievement. One of the things we've got to do is somehow get the older readers who read X-Men to take interest in X-Force. I think that's the biggest hinderance. If you get that other market in there, the older crowd, then the sales are going to rise dramatically.

CM: What's going to do that? It's going to take more than just a character like Cable.

GC: Fabian's definitely going much more into character development than when Rob was involved and he's trying to give it more of an adult appeal. We were hoping with "The Executioner's Song" to retain some readers but it didn't happen like we thought it would. But, hey, anything's still possible. We've just got to choose the right direction. At the same time, Bob Harras cringes at the idea of X-Force replacing X-Men because as Fabian put it, it's like the flagship. It's sort of this romantic thing that you don't want to mess with.

CM: But once upon a time X-Men was a dead title.

GC: Right. So who knows.

CM: What was the flagship in 1974 and 1975 before Chris Claremont and Dave Cockrum resurrected the X-Men? Was it Spider-Man? Or was it Fantastic Four? It was probably one of the two or both.

GC: Right.

CM: FF has been in the toilet in sales. I would think that Stan would have called that his flagship. History has a funny way of writing itself. I think X-Force has a lot of potential. I always did. What X-Force did was an instant phenomena and it wasn't just Cable. I thought that Shatter Star also had tremendous potential.

GC: Right. He had lost a lot of his appeal but we gave him a new costume and Fabian's trying to write him more cool now to bring his popularity back. Originally there was talk of getting rid of him and I said no way.

CM: No, he's the second best character in the band.

GC: I agree 100 percent. We're trying to do more with Shatter Star and I love the character myself.

CM: I think Cannonball...or Sam Guthrie is also a very interesting character. He's very much like Scott Summers was when they were developing that character. They've changed Scott Summers lately. All of those characters really hold quite a bit more potential than you possibly could have brought out in the short two years time. Think about the early Wolverine character the way that John Romita created him. Dave Cockrum told me that he hated doing Wolverine. He thought he was just a nasty little character—a little upstart. It wasn't until three or four years later when John

"I'VE HEARD THAT [VALIANT PAYS] $6,000 UP FRONT TO A PENCILLER BEFORE HE PUTS A PENCIL TO PAPER AND THEN THE ROYALTIES..."

Byrne got his hands on him that something serious was done with Wolverine. Lo and behold, Wolverine is probably the single most popular character in the Marvel Universe right now.

GC: Yeah. He's up there. I agree with you. I haven't counted X-Force out by any means. I think there's still a chance to drag it up higher.

CM: So when are you going to do 501 Jeans commercials?

GC: [laughs] Yeah. Right.

CM: You mentioned Valiant. How much does Valiant pay?

GC: I've heard that they pay $6,000 up front to a penciller before he puts a pencil to paper and then the royalties...

CM: That's a bonus to sign up?

GC: I would think that it's kind of like your page rate coupled with an advance on your royalties or something to that nature. I'm not sure of the details. Their royalty rates are much higher than Marvel's...1.5% and upward sliding scale. Of course, there's Image's very, very lucrative deals.

CM: What is Image's deal?

GC: It was a 90/10 split and now I guess it's 80/20.

CM: But they pay you no page rate.

GC: I'm not sure on that detail.

CM: That's what I've heard.

GC: When you're talking about that much money, who really cares? It's going to be interesting to see how Marvel tries to compete with that.

CM: I've thought about this myself. Where will the industry be five years from now? Will Marvel still have 50 percent share? Not if they continue the way they're going. I've talked to some of their editors who don't know anything at all about comic books, which is frightening. It would certainly frighten me if I was paying their salaries! Not only do they not know anything about comic books, they don't seem to know a heck of a lot about artwork or writing either. So what are they doing there? Well, they probably know a lot about smoothing people over and

kissing up and climbing higher in a corporate environment. I've seen that happen in many companies I've worked for. These other companies, Image particularly and Valiant, are not mega-buck corporations. They're what Marvel was in the '60s. They exist on a team effort with some terribly creative people at the helm. I thought that Valiant might lose it's position when Shooter left because I still think that Shooter drove most of what happened there. In fact, I think that Shooter's Defiant Comics is going to be a force to be reckoned with.

GC: I haven't heard anything about them but I think Marvel is going to have to start giving us higher pay scales and they're going to have to increase the amount of royalties that they part with. They've got to do something to stay competitive otherwise what's going to keep artists with talent at Marvel? Why would anybody stay there instead of going someplace where they could do the same work and make five times as much money? Marvel's got to compete on that level and let you get a little bigger slice of the pie when a book you've done has been turned into a t-shirt or a poster or a toy or something like that. They've got to start competing otherwise I can't see them staying on top and I can see Image, if they keep going, and Valiant replacing Marvel. This would be a ways down the road because Marvel still owns a lot of the market.

CM: The difference between what Image has done and what Valiant has done is that Image has combined some of the best and worst talent in the industry with tremendous packaging and marketing. Valiant, on the other hand, followed the old Marvel formula and created a small universe of characters that people love. They also had great marketing. I think in the long term their "universe" has greater potential and greater longevity. Image continues to come out with limited series. With the exception of Spawn, everything is limited #1 through #4 so they can continually recycle and put out a #1. Fans will wise up to that eventually.

GC: We say. But who's to say?

"I THINK MARVEL IS GOING TO HAVE TO START GIVING US HIGHER PAY SCALES AND THEY'RE GOING TO HAVE TO INCREASE THE AMOUNT OF ROYALTIES THAT THEY PART WITH. THEY'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING TO STAY COMPETITIVE OTHERWISE WHAT'S GOING TO KEEP ARTISTS WITH TALENT AT MARVEL?"

"THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT THAT #1 ISSUE THAT KIDS ARE JUST COMPELLED TO BUY... ADULTS WILL WISE UP TO THAT BUT WILL THOSE KIDS WHO ARE REALLY MOST OF THE MARKET AND ARE SHELLING OUT THAT MONEY? I DON'T KNOW."

CM: We say, well, you're right.

GC: There's something about that #1 issue that kids are just compelled to buy. We're adults who say wise up to them eventually, but kids are still kids. Adults will wise up to that but will those kids who are really most of the market and are shelling out that money? I don't know.

CM: How about DC? Do they have a snowball's chance in hell?

GC: I don't know. I really, really don't know having never really followed DC.

CM: DC's trying to adjust itself to the oldest audience. With their Vertigo line they're really going after the old crowd. They're becoming very writer-oriented. Of course, even Image is going after some of the better writers now. Guys like William Messner-Loebs. He was doing the Flash and Wonder Woman. He just did a book for Image- -The Maxx with Sam Kieth. He's one of the best writers in the industry. Image knows that they have to get writers now.

GC: Right. To be honest with you, I can see Image becoming the new kingpin.

CM: Even before Valiant? Just because they have the artists?

GC: That's got a lot to do with it. They've got the monster talent. They've got that corner of the market all locked up.

CM: Do you think they need to blend their universe, get characters working together?

GC: In their own line you're talking about? Not like a Valiant crossover type thing? You're talking about within their own universe?

CM: Right.

GC: Well haven't they already started to do that like Youngblood mixing with W.I.L.D.CATS?

CM: A little bit. Maybe they have. But it's so weak, you barely notice. The appeal is this dazzling art, the bleeds, the splash pages. I miss the stories.

GC: Yeah, so they're already going in that direction. I don't follow all of their titles so I don't know what they've done. I've only seen Jim Lee's stuff and Silvestri's stuff because they're two of my favorite artists. But we mentioned how wise Rob is so I think they'll figure out what they need to do.

CM: That's true. If I can sit here and think of it, they can certainly think of it collectively. They're a smart bunch. There's no question about that. In the meantime, Valiant continues to ramp up as you were saying. Have you looked at any of their comics?

GC: Not yet but I'm going to start delving into it a little bit more.

CM: Initially they were criticized for having a house style and for having imposed that upon the artists. Had you heard anything about that?

GC: I may have heard that but...

CM: That seems to have changed now that Shooter has left.

GC: Well that's good because I personally could never work that way. It wouldn't be fun. It would be a drag. It'd be, "See you later." If somebody ever told me to draw like somebody else that would be it for me.

CM: If you look at the early Valiant books across the board they all pretty much look the same, with the exception of what Barry Smith was doing and even he was following a certain panel style.

GC: Really?

CM: Yeah I think so. I could be wrong, but that's what I remember.

GC: It kind of takes all the fun out of it. It's like watching a TV show that has all the same actors in it but it's a different story.

CM: What do you think of Barry Smith's work?

GC: He's the best. The very best.

CM: That's gorgeous work, isn't it?

GC: That guy is amazing. Nobody can really touch him. He's the Leonardo Da Vinci. As much as I love John Buscema...Barry Windsor [-Smith] is totally off by himself.

CM: Do you know that the first book he did for Marvel was X-Men.

GC: Really?

CM: He did X-Men #53. You've got to take a look at it sometime. You'll never know...well if you know that it's Barry Smith you'll find Barry Smith in it, but other than that you won't know it's Barry Smith.

GC: Was he doing Kirby at the time?

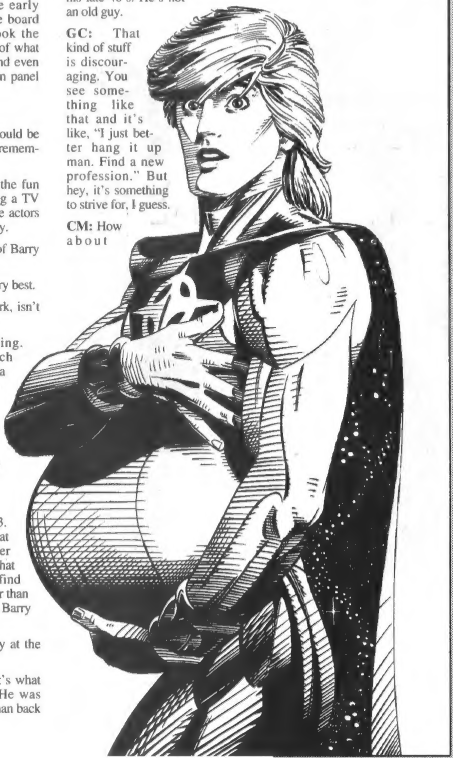
CM: Yeah, I guess. That's what everybody was doing. He was probably a pretty young man back then.

GC: Do you know how old he is now?

CM: I only met him once when I was about 14 years old and I got his autograph. I was so thrilled. Like you said, it was like meeting DaVinci. He was a pretty young guy then. I took him for being 30 something. Maybe he's in his late 40's. He's not an old guy.

GC: That kind of stuff is discouraging. You see something like that and it's like, "I just better hang it up man. Find a new profession." But hey, it's something to strive for, I guess.

CM: How about



"I DON'T CARE IF [ART STUDENTS] CONSIDER [COMICS] AN ART FORM OR NOT. TELL THEM TO SIT DOWN AND TRY TO DO IT MONTH AFTER MONTH... THEN ASK THEM THEIR OPINION IF THEY THINK IT'S ART."

Don Perlin? Do you remember his work for Marvel?

GC: Yeah. I remember Don Perlin.

CM: I was sort of surprised to see his name pop up as art director at Valiant. Apparently he's become one of the more competent people in the business now to land that position. So where do you think comics are headed for in the long term? What's your vision of comics in the year 2001?

GC: If it's anything like where television's going, I guess there'll be profanity and nudity and everything else. Who knows. If they degrade like everything else is degraded...I really can't say, though. I don't know enough about the industry and don't follow the industry enough to recognize what the trends are and where they're headed. I have no charts in front of me to see what direction it's going but everything tends to degrade and the world just gets more and more mucked up.

CM: So you think that comics have degraded from when you were reading them?

GC: No. When I say degraded I just mean profanities and nudity everywhere, although not that I object to it. So who knows? If it follows suit...you may get those head hunters who put that little code stamp on there so maybe that will never happen.

CM: The Code's not on everything.

GC: This is true.

CM: Do you think comics will ever be considered an art form in America?

GC: I hope they are now. You talk to art students at colleges and they pooh-pooh it.

CM: Rock 'n' roll was never considered music by the industry and then all of the sudden it was.

GC: Right. I don't care if they consider it an art form or not. Tell them to sit down and try to do it month after month. Find a story and come up with new creative ways of showing it and then interpret a plot visually and draw it well. Then ask them their opinion if they think it's art.

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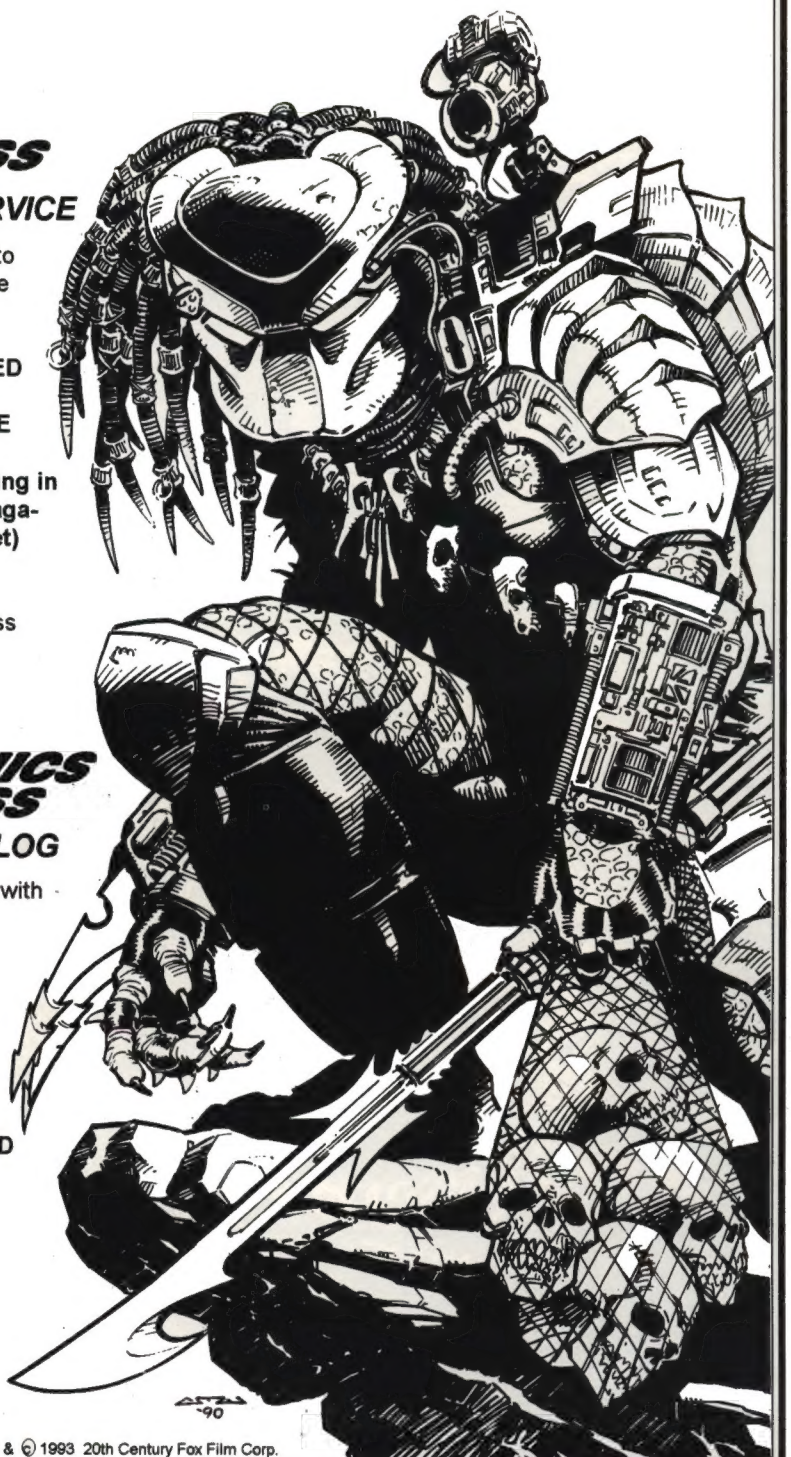

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